

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole-School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

**Nenagh College  
Nenagh, County Tipperary  
Roll number: 72440K**

**Date of inspection: 8 May 2014**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS  
INSPECTORATE**

# **Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning**

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May, 2014 in Nenagh College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## ***Introduction***

Nenagh College and Nenagh College of Further Education, formerly Nenagh Vocational School, is one of three providers of second-level education in the town of Nenagh. It also offers a small range of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The school operates under the auspices of the Tipperary Education and Training Board (ETB). It is the only mixed second-level school in the town and caters for students from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. Enrolment in the school has increased steadily over the past number of years and a recent major extension and renovation of the school's facilities has been a very positive development. The school now benefits from a range of state-of-the-art facilities.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management is appropriately constituted and operates effectively as a committee of the Tipperary ETB.
- The members of the senior management team work well together in discharging an extensive range of duties.
- The school has successfully emerged from a challenging period of change, particularly in relation to extensive accommodation developments.
- A significant allocation of middle-management posts combined with high levels of volunteerism among staff provide good scope for the devolution of management responsibility among staff.
- The school operates an open and inclusive admissions policy.
- Management and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the care of students but there is a need to develop and implement more formal communication structures.
- A significant strength of the school is its broad curriculum, complemented by an open choice of subjects.
- Subject department planning is well established in the school with scope for greater consistency and the further development of short-term schemes of work in some instances.
- The standard of learning and teaching ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- The board of management should oversee the development of a strategic plan with targets and actions identified to address key priorities over defined timeframes.
- The posts of responsibility schedule should be reviewed and more closely aligned to the school's needs and priorities.
- Practice in relation to the documentation of supports for students with additional educational needs should be further developed.
- The school's code of behaviour should be reviewed in consultation with key stakeholders.
- Existing student care structures should be further supported by the facilitation of regular meetings of key personnel.
- Additional time should be allocated to subject-department planning with the aim of developing a greater consistency of approach and the further development of short-term schemes of work for a number of subjects and programmes.
- Increased use should be made of strategies for differentiation to support student learning across the range of abilities.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The board of management operates as a committee of the Tipperary ETB and demonstrates a strong awareness of the role of the ETB in providing oversight on the operation of schools. The core membership of the board has remained constant in recent years with some new members joining recently in order to ensure that selection criteria continued to be met. In light of this, the board should ensure regular training for all members throughout the lifetime of the board.

Policy documentation is drafted at school level in consultation with staff, parents and students. These draft policies are then presented, through the principal, to the board for approval.

The recent focus of the board has been primarily on disciplinary issues and on the expansion and renovation of school facilities. Given the successful outcome of the school's building project, it is now timely for the board to refocus and to broaden the scope of its activities. In order to progress this, the board should develop a strategic plan to include time-bound developmental priorities and targets for the future. Planning should give priority to a review of the school's code of behaviour, the refinement of existing policies and procedures as well as the development of mechanisms that will provide the board with increased oversight in relation to learning and teaching in the school. One such mechanism would be to request a short annual report from subject co-ordinators and post holders outlining the progress and challenges in their work.

Students are given leadership opportunities through the student council and through a highly valued mentoring programme in which senior students provide support to younger students. The student council is democratically elected and is representative of the entire student body. They are engaged in school activities under the guidance of a liaison teacher. Given the considerable leadership skills evident among council members, the council should investigate ways of increasing their visibility and profile among the student body. Council meetings would also benefit from a more structured approach.

Management is conscious of the positive impact of the involvement of parents in school activities. Many of the members of the parents' association have given long service to the school and involve themselves in a variety of activities to support the school. Such activities merit further promotion and management should explore additional ways of working with parents to promote the work of the association.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The principal and deputy principal work well together in discharging an extensive range of duties. They have successfully led the school through a period of significant change. Of particular importance has been the experience that each individually brings to the management team.

Despite recent retirements, the school has retained a significant allocation of middle-management posts. This is supplemented by high levels of volunteerism among staff, some of whom have taken on significant responsibilities on a voluntary basis. This provides management with significant scope to devolve managerial functions and tasks among staff. In order to optimise this significant resource, it is timely to review the duties and tasks assigned to posts of responsibility within the school. Such a review should be conducted in conjunction with a review of the functions of the senior management team.

In recent years the school's developmental priorities have been focused on developing the school's infrastructure and maintaining curriculum provision. In the context of school self-evaluation (SSE), the identification of needs and priorities in the medium to long term should now be undertaken. As part of the SSE process, attendance and punctuality has been prioritised for monitoring and improvement. In order to do this in a more informed and strategic manner, practices and procedures in relation to attendance and punctuality need to be more robust. The impending roll-out of an attendance monitoring system should be of benefit in this regard and the SSE process can be applied to data collected from this system. Work is ongoing in relation to addressing literacy at whole-school level. The SSE process will now need to be applied to either literacy or numeracy in order to comply with Circular Letter 40/2012.

Time provision for all subjects is in line with syllabus requirements. However, it is important to ensure that the distribution of periods throughout the week facilitates regular contact with all subjects. In addition, there is an ongoing need to ensure an appropriate daily balance between practical and more theory-based classes.

There is a variety of provisions in place to cater for students with additional educational needs. These include team teaching, the provision of smaller class groups, some individual withdrawal or a combination of these approaches. In order to track the supports provided in a more coherent manner, it is recommended that more detailed documentation be compiled that will record how each student's allocation of support hours is being delivered across all forms of provision. There is continuing professional development (CPD) planned for all staff in the area of special educational needs (SEN) and this is a welcome development. The focus of this CPD should be on agreeing the most effective structures for the delivery of supports and on maximising the benefits of team teaching. It would be worthwhile to conduct an audit of the overall CPD needs of staff with a view to drafting a three to five-year CPD programme.

Informal communication at all levels in the school is very strong. However, there is a need for more formal meetings throughout the year in areas such as subject department planning and student care. Such meetings should be possible from within the existing allocation.

A significant strength of the school is its broad curriculum complemented by an open choice of subjects at both junior and senior cycle. The school offers a broad Transition Year (TY) programme that opens students up to new experiences and encourages students to be reflective. There has been a broadening of the assessment modes undertaken in many TY modules and the work experience programme is well structured.

The school operates a very open admissions policy. The progress of students who transfer from other schools is closely monitored through the school's student care structures, particularly during their first month in the school. Given the range of adjustments that students need to make before they become integrated fully into a new school setting, consideration should be given to extending this monitoring period beyond one month.

The school's code of behaviour is a detailed document that has been compiled over a period of time in response to evolving challenges. This has led to the creation of an overly complex set of procedures. Such complexity can give rise to inconsistencies in the application of the sanctions based approach. It is recommended that this policy be reviewed with a focus on the rights and responsibilities of students and teachers. The revised document should include clear delineation between minor and more serious infringements of the code.

Student support structures in the school have gone through a period of transition in recent years. This has been mainly due to the retirement of post holders, including year heads, involved in the care structure. In line with recently published well-being guidelines in post-primary schools, it is recommended that regular meetings of the care team be introduced and that year heads be facilitated in attending these meetings on a rotating basis as needs emerge. It would also be worthwhile reviewing the role of year head with specific reference to the role of the year head within the school's student support structures.

The school's guidance service is highly valued by students. Guidance is timetabled for all senior-cycle students and there are targeted interventions at junior cycle. Standardised testing is administered through the guidance department and there are good links in place with local enterprise. A counselling service is provided in accordance with the resources available.

Responses to parent and student questionnaires conducted during the evaluation indicate high levels of positivity about the school. Responses from parents provide evidence of a school that maintains high levels of transparency in its dealings with parents and is accommodating and welcoming. Students indicated particular satisfaction with the advice and counsel they received from teachers during key transitional phases in their schooling and were also very positive about the feedback they get from teachers in relation to the quality of their work.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

### ***1.3 Management of facilities***

The school is very well maintained and has recently been awarded its second green flag by An Taisce. Recent accommodation developments have provided the school community with a range of state-of-the-art facilities. These facilities include specialist rooms, communal areas, multi-purpose rooms, a canteen as well as a combination of indoor and outdoor sports facilities. The school is currently seeking funding to develop an all-weather facility on the school campus.

The school's health and safety statement is currently being updated and there are good systems in place whereby teachers carry out risk assessments in their own classrooms and specialist areas.

There are a number of staff involved in the management of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and it is evident that there is a considerable base of ICT expertise among the staff. In order to optimise the benefits of this considerable resource, it is recommended that a five-year e-learning plan be drawn up by a core group of staff with input from management. The focus of the plan should be on curriculum integration, professional development and the further development of an e-learning culture in the school.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### ***2.1 The quality of learning and teaching***

Long term plans are in place for every subject and work is ongoing in relation to short-term schemes of work. There is scope for greater consistency of practice both within and across most subject departments in relation to the further development of these schemes of work. Formal planning meetings are held each September. In order to facilitate further development in subject planning there is a need to dedicate more time from within school planning time for collaborative subject planning. Individual lessons were planned to a high standard with high-quality supplementary resources, including ICT resources, sourced and prepared in advance of lessons.

Learning outcomes were shared in a minority of lessons and this provided students with a focus for their learning and facilitated efficient and effective consolidation of learning at the end of lessons. It is suggested that the use of learning outcomes to frame the lesson content be discussed at subject department level with a view to agreeing a more consistent approach to lesson structure.

The standard of learning and teaching ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed. Very good lessons were characterised by a purposeful pace, high expectations and a range of student-centred activities. There were opportunities for collaboration and for students to reflect on their own experiences as well as on prior learning. In addition, the lesson content allowed all students to achieve while providing sufficient challenge for the more able students. In some lessons, the resources and activities used were not sufficiently differentiated to fully accommodate the range of abilities in the class. This resulted in some students disengaging from the learning process during the lesson. It is therefore recommended that increased use be made of strategies for differentiation to support student learning across the range of abilities.

Where classroom management was most effective, teachers were operating on an agreed set of classroom standards with the class group and there were established routines in place in relation to seating plans, materials and the conduct of students. Such routines warrant extension to all classes and could be included as part of the revised code of behaviour.

Effective questioning strategies were used in almost all lessons. Higher-order, probing and inclusive questioning strategies were used to good effect in many instances. In some lessons, there was a tendency to overly support students in their learning though the over-use of teacher exposition rather than allowing students to engage more actively with the lesson content. There is also further scope to develop strategies that will enable students to take more ownership of their learning and to assess their own progress. Further engagement

with activities such as student self-evaluation and peer review are some options that could be explored in this context.

An emphasis on developing students' literacy skills was evident in almost all lessons. Literacy strategies were most effective when integrated through lessons rather than when treated as a stand-alone activity.

Teachers and students have created stimulating learning environments throughout the school. Displays of subject-related content were a feature of almost all classrooms. Such displays were supplemented by examples of students' own work in a number of cases. In some lessons, the seating arrangements were adapted to suit the lesson format. Positive student behaviour and respectful interactions between teachers and students were highly evident in lessons.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### ***3.1 Management***

Recommendations from previous evaluations in relation to school management have been implemented in the majority of cases. Following on from the recent evaluation of SEN, there is a continued need to refine the role of the learning support teacher in the team-teaching context. It would be worthwhile to consider approaches to team teaching that would accommodate the support teacher working more directly with students, or alternatively, approaches that would facilitate both teachers sharing the lead role in lessons.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

The implementation of key recommendations in relation to learning and teaching from previous evaluations was tracked throughout the course of the WSE-MLL evaluation. Particular areas of interest that had arisen in previous evaluations included the use of ICT to support teaching and learning, the inclusion of a suitable range of student-centred activities in lessons, the prioritisation of students' literacy development and the provision of regular feedback to students on the quality of their work. Progress in addressing these key recommendations was found to be very good across all key areas of interest.

### **4. THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The school currently has an SSE team in place and this team is made up of a combination of post holders and volunteers from the staff. Second and fifth-year parents were surveyed in order to assist in determining priorities for development and to date, the focus has been on attendance and punctuality.

There are literacy strategies currently in place and these were evident throughout lesson observations. Such strategies should be more fully reflected in subject department planning and the SSE process should be applied in full in order to ensure a clear evidence base to support the strategies in use. As part of this process, the further development of subject-specific strategies is required in order to tailor the school's literacy strategies to the specific nuances of each subject.